

## **SUPER Teachers: New Grant Award Targets Supervision Skills for Teachers**

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**W**hile special and general education teachers are taught to interact effectively with students with disabilities and their families, little inservice or preservice training is devoted to effective interaction with paraprofessionals. Recently, the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation was awarded a 3-year, U. S. Department of

Education grant to develop a multi-media training program to promote effective supervision and use of paraprofessionals. Project SUPER Teachers (Supervision and Utilization of Paraeducators - A Repertoire for Teachers) began in September 1995 to develop, evaluate, and disseminate a video-assisted training program which will help teachers learn to work more effectively with paraeducators.

### The Need to Develop Teachers' Supervision Skills

Paraprofessionals usually work under the supervision of a professional educator, typically a certified classroom teacher (Pickett, 1986). However, teachers are not generally prepared to assume a supervisory role (Vasa & Steckelberg, 1987).

*(Continued on Page 6)*

## **Behavior Management Trainer For Teachers**

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**T**he move toward community integration and inclusion for people with disabilities has created new challenges for those charged with preparing staff to work within new contexts. Not the least of these challenges is preparing general education teachers to work with students with disabilities, particularly those who exhibit challenging behaviors.

Few colleges of education offer classes in behavior management for general

*(Continued on Page 2)*

### **Inside**

**Videodisc curriculum  
converted to  
videotape ..... 4**

**Teaching Teachers ..... 5**

**MPRRC has new  
director ..... 8**

Given the large numbers of paraprofessionals in special education and in Title I programs, it is surprising how little attention has been paid to preparing certified teachers to work with them. Survey research (May & Marozas, 1986) indicates that, of the relatively few colleges and universities that include supervision of paraprofessionals in their preservice teacher education program at all, only a small minority treat it with any depth. According to Lindeman and Beegle (1988), only 13% of the teachers they surveyed had course content in paraprofessional evaluation and training, only 11% had content on professional communication, and only 7% had training in utilization and management.

The growing use of paraprofessionals in public school classrooms, while of great potential benefit to students, raises complex problems for some teachers. First, the mandatory presence of another adult in the classroom may be construed as an intrusion (Salzberg & Morgan, in press). This is particularly probable when, as in many cases, teachers do not select their own paraprofessional partners. Second, confusion about the role of the paraprofessional may compound the problem. For example, some districts have policies which prohibit paraprofessionals from

delivering instruction. Yet in many of those districts, paraprofessionals do in fact assume instructional duties (Salzberg & Morgan, in press). Third, in most states, paraprofessionals receive little training to prepare them to assume their classroom duties (Blalock, 1991; Morgan, 1994; Pickett, 1988). Therefore, it often falls to their first supervising teacher to orient paraprofessionals to the public school system and to provide specific

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training in whatever areas the paraprofessional is going to be assigned. Fourth, interpersonal relationships can also be problematic when people are obliged to work side by side on a daily basis. These interpersonal difficulties can be exacerbated when, as sometimes occurs, there is a large age discrepancy between teacher and paraeducators, or when these colleagues are from different cultures, socioeconomic groups or ethnic backgrounds. Finally,

few teachers anticipated directing another adult when they prepared for their professional careers, which prompted French (1994) to characterize the teachers she interviewed as "reluctant supervisors."

Numbers of paraeducators in special education and related services are estimated to have burgeoned from 150,000 in 1980 to 400,000 in 1990 (Pickett, 1986). Indeed, teachers need comprehensive training in effective supervision, evaluation, and management of paraeducators. Unfortunately, only a few training programs exist (Pickett, 1992; Gerlach 1990). Moreover, no program has used video technology to illustrate issues that arise in supervision, communication, and evaluation of paraeducators. Video-assisted training would provide opportunities for special and general teachers to participate in simulations of potential problems, identify different action strategies, and brainstorm solutions.

#### Project SUPER Teachers: Objectives and Description

Using research and development procedures, the project will oversee cycles of field-testing, evaluation, and refinement. The resulting program will be used by colleges and universities and in inservice training to better prepare teachers to direct,

(Continued on Page 7)

manage, and supervise paraeducators who work in public school classrooms. Project SUPER Teachers will train teachers to enhance the skills and advance the careers of paraeducators through effective supervision. The program will focus on important but often neglected skills, such as goal-setting with paraeducators, maximizing their strengths, promoting their skills, problem-solving, negotiating, and ensuring accountability. The project will develop a flexible, versatile training program formatted for preservice, university teacher training; for inservice training of teachers in the field; and for interactive distance education delivery. Video will (a) illustrate communication problems that result in supervision problems (e.g., misinterpretation, disagreement, imposition of authority), (b) allow teachers to brainstorm possible solutions, (c) view different ways to solve supervision problems, (d) view effective and ineffective ways to address supervision problems, and (e) discuss other potential solutions. This print- and video-based (videodisc and VHS tape) curriculum will provide comprehensive skills to teachers in supervision and deployment of paraprofessionals.

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